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ABSTRACT

Employers and clerical workers, numbering 445 and 238 respectively, who resided in 30 states, were surveyed about parental child care, company employment problems affected by child care, and employee benefits. Of particular interest were (1) the degree to which child care needs might affect overall productivity and job performance of clerical workers; (2) the degree to which specific work-related problems such as absenteeism or tardiness might be affected by clerical employees' child care responsibilities; (3) child care benefits which companies currently offered or were considering, the extent of clerical workers' interest in child care benefits, and the benefits workers considered most helpful; and (4) how employers' and clerical workers' perceptions and beliefs might affect child care related issues. Throughout this report, attitudes and opinions of all respondents are integrated into discussions of the other three areas of concern in order to illuminate findings. Appendix 1 presents detailed findings on respondents' positions. Appendix 2 places demographic data on marital status, age, and income under the categories of temporary and permanent employment and presence or absence of children. Appendix 3 indicates child care responsibilities with the most impact for clerical employees with children of four different age ranges. (RH)

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CHILD CARE AND THE CLERICAL WORKFORCE

85/86 NATIONAL SURVEY

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Introduction

Child care has come out of the home and into the office in the 80's: half of the women in today's workforce have children under the age of six. Increasingly, companies of all sizes, in industries from banking to transportation, manufacturing to health care, have had to confront the issue of working parents' child care needs, as these responsibilities impact workplace productivity and efficiency. This issue is particularly crucial for the non-managerial ranks – the clerical workforce for whom working may be less an option than an economic necessity.

Who are today's clerical workforce parents? How do they balance their work and home life responsibilities? How do they view their employers' role in their lives outside the office – as bane or blessing?

On the employers' side, what impact do employees' child care needs have on job performance? How does child care affect the recruitment and retention of quality clerical workers? What new benefits or policies are being developed to address the issue of child care and the clerical workforce? And are these programs truly effective – or are they merely a "band-aid" solution for a larger problem?

These are some of the issues we have sought to address with this survey. Our findings are based on information provided by both employers and by temporary and permanent clerical employees throughout the United States.

The Sample

Adia surveyed 445 employers and 238 clerical workers in 30 states. The anonymous survey results were tabulated by an independent market research firm.

Questionnaire Format

Survey questions cover four major areas:

1. **Parental Child Care Situations:** the degree to which child care needs may affect overall productivity and job performance of clerical workers.
2. **Company Employment Situations:** the degree to which specific work related problems such as absenteeism or tardiness may be affected by clerical employees' child care responsibilities.
3. **Benefits and Policies:**
   - what child care benefits are currently being offered by companies or are under consideration;
   - how interested clerical workers are in existing or proposed child care benefits;
   - which benefits clerical workers with children consider most helpful.
4. **Attitudes and Opinions:** how employers' and clerical workers' perceptions and beliefs affect child care related issues. Throughout the report, attitudes and opinions of all respondents have been integrated into the other three subject areas in order to illuminate survey findings. Appendix 1 presents these findings in detail.

Questions were based on either a four-point rating scale ("No Impact" to "Great Deal Of Impact") or a five-point rating scale ("Disagree Completely" to "Agree Completely").

The Employer Sample

A wide range of businesses in the manufacturing, professional, public, and private service sectors responded to the survey. Both company size and clerical staff size varied greatly.

The Sample (continued)

Table A □ Company And Clerical Staff Size

	Total Employees		Clerical Employees
Under 100	22%	Under 25	25%
101-200	15%	25-50	17%
201-500	22%	51-100	16%
501-1000	15%	101-500	25%
Over 1000	19%	Over 500	9%
No Answer	7%	No Answer	8%

The majority of respondents (80%) were personnel department staff.

Table B □ Employer Respondents By Job Title

Personnel/Human Resources Manager	31%
Personnel Assistant	29%
Other/Personnel	20%
Office Manager	14%
Other/Non-Personnel	6%

The Employee Sample

Adia surveyed 147 of its temporary clerical workers (62% of total sample) and 91 permanent job placement candidates (38% of sample). Of the total sample, 122 respondents have children (51% of total clerical sample).

About half of the entire clerical sample is married. Six in ten of the respondents are between 25 and 39 years of age, and this figure jumps to seven in ten for clerical employees with children.

The income for the entire clerical population, married or unmarried, with or without children, is low: less than $20,000 a year for nearly 50% of the sample. As might be expected, permanent employees with a steady income earn somewhat more than temporaries, with 45% of permanent employees reporting incomes over $30,000 as compared to 24% for temporaries. (Refer to Appendix 2 for a complete summary of all demographic data).

The Sample (continued)

Of the temporary clerical sample, approximately one half are working temporary while looking for a permanent job. About one fourth of the temporaries with children say they don't want to work full time because they have children at home. Many of them indicated that they prefer the freedom to choose their own days and hours as well as the variety of temporary assignments.

Permanent clerical employees gave a combination of economic, social, and emotional reasons for working, as seen below. (Total exceeds 100% due to multiple responses).

Table C □ Permanent Clerical Employees – Why They Work

	Total	With Children	Without Children
To contribute to family finances	45%	57%	32%
Because I enjoy working	36%	39%	32%
To support myself	30%	6%	61%
For the social environment	26%	29%	24%
To provide for my family	21%	37%	—

Interestingly, fully one half of permanent clerical employees (50%) would *continue* to work full time, even if they had enough money for their needs! Another third (33%) would continue to work part-time. Those respondents with children (39%) are slightly more likely to choose part-time work than those without children (24%). Only about one employee in ten (10%) would choose to tend the home fires full time.

While a higher percentage of permanent employees have children at home than do temporary workers (56% as compared with 48%), temporaries have a greater *number* of children at home (52% of temporaries have two or more children at home, compared with 37% of permanent employees).

The Sample (continued)

Working temporary affords clerical employees greater scheduling flexibility, which may explain why temporaries with children tend to have a wider network of care givers available to them than do permanent clerical workers. (Totals exceed 100% due to multiple responses).

Table D □ Who Cares For Clerical Employees' Children?

	Total	Temporaries	Permanent Employees
Day Care Center	37%	35%	40%
Relative	28%	36%	20%
Babysitter	25%	27%	22%
Neighbor	12%	16%	7%
Older adult	11%	15%	7%
Older child	8%	9%	7%
Spouse	6%	7%	4%
Other	12%	13%	11%

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The Parents: Child Care Situations

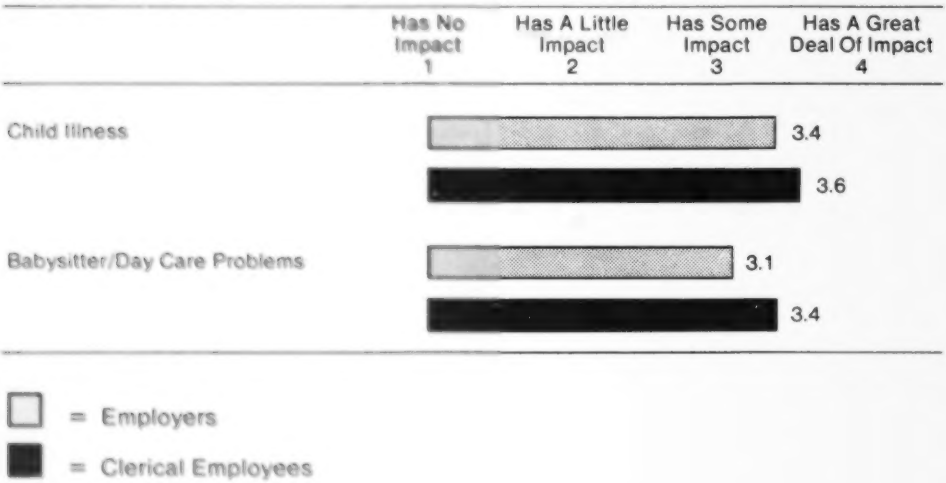
Who's minding the kids? Both employers and clerical employees tend to agree that despite the meteoric growth of the two-career couple over the last decade, the mother is still primarily responsible for child care and family needs. Both groups also acknowledge that if a woman works outside the home, her job is likely to be far more affected by child care responsibilities than is a man's job.

Given that child care can have a profound impact on an employee's job performance, the question becomes, which child care situations affect the job the most?

Dealing With The Unexpected

Overall, employers and clerical workers agree that child illness and babysitter/day care problems have the greatest impact on clerical workers' productivity and job performance. These problems represent the kinds of emergencies that neither employer nor employee can anticipate. One of the ways parents may deal with a sick child or a babysitter who fails to show is by taking a sick day.

Table 1 □ Impact Of Child Illness/Day Care Problems



The Parents (continued)

As would be expected, clerical workers with children view these problems as having a greater impact on the job than do clerical workers without children. For example, 54% of the clerical workers with children feel babysitter/day care problems have a great deal of impact on productivity, compared with 36% of childless clerical workers.

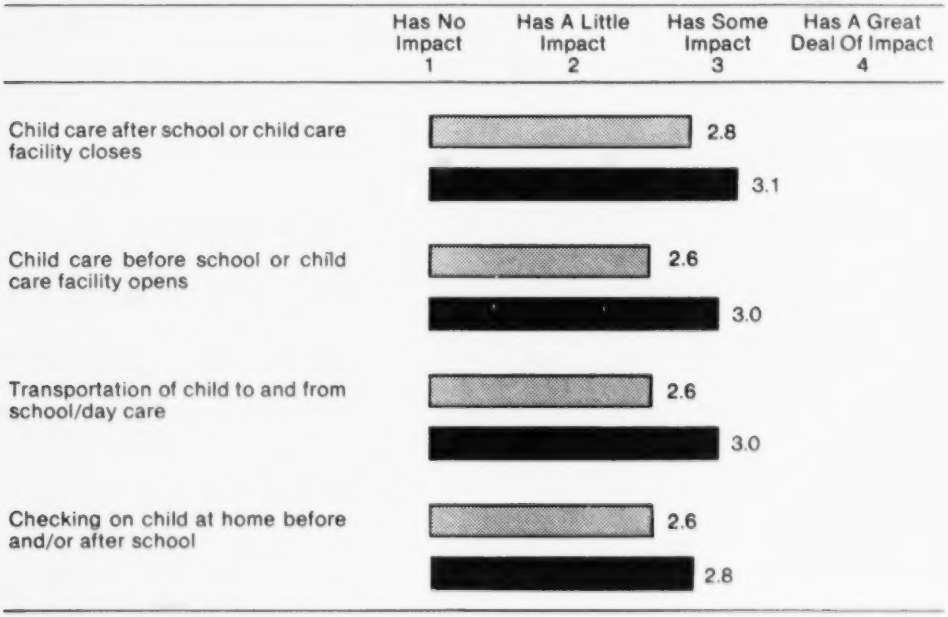
Not surprisingly, child illness and babysitter/day care problems have the greatest impact on women with children under the age of six. (Refer to Appendix 3).

The Daily Care Dilemma

Working mothers often have difficulty coordinating their work schedules with the hours of school and/or day care. Some mothers have to be on the job before school or day care opens, and find that their workday often extends several hours beyond when school or day care closes. As a result, these working parents must arrange for someone else to mind their children both before and after school. Transportation alone can become a logistical nightmare.

Permanent clerical workers tend to have more scheduling conflicts than their temporary counterparts, since the former group generally has less job flexibility. Faced with a child care scheduling dilemma, temporary workers have the option of taking a day off, or of specifying which hours they are available to work.

Table 2 □ Impact Of Day-to-Day Child Care Needs



The Parents (continued)

Both clerical workers and their employers agree that schools should provide more child care services before and after school to ease the burden on working parents. Regardless of whether or not they have children, clerical workers feel more strongly about the need for assistance, since they are closest to the situation: employees are as likely to hear about a child care problem from a co-worker as they are to experience it themselves.

Personnel department staff are less likely to hear about workers' difficulties for a number of reasons: they are excluded from the clerical grapevine by the nature of their position in the company hierarchy (management vs. line employees); employees may fear that they will jeopardize their jobs if they bring unmet family needs to work; clerical workers believe that management expects employees to put their jobs ahead of their personal needs.

Checking on children at home before and after school tends to be a bigger issue among mothers of school age children. (Refer to Appendix 3). Some school age children must get to and from school on their own. Labelled "latch-key kids," these children go home to an empty house and stay alone or with an older sibling until a parent gets home from work. Understandably, parents periodically telephone their children from work to make sure they are all right.

Neither employers nor parents feel that parents spend "a lot" of work time checking up on their children. However, it may be that parents aren't admitting to the amount of company time they actually spend calling home, for some of the reasons described above. And while companies are aware that some of this activity is going on, they have no clear indication of how much.

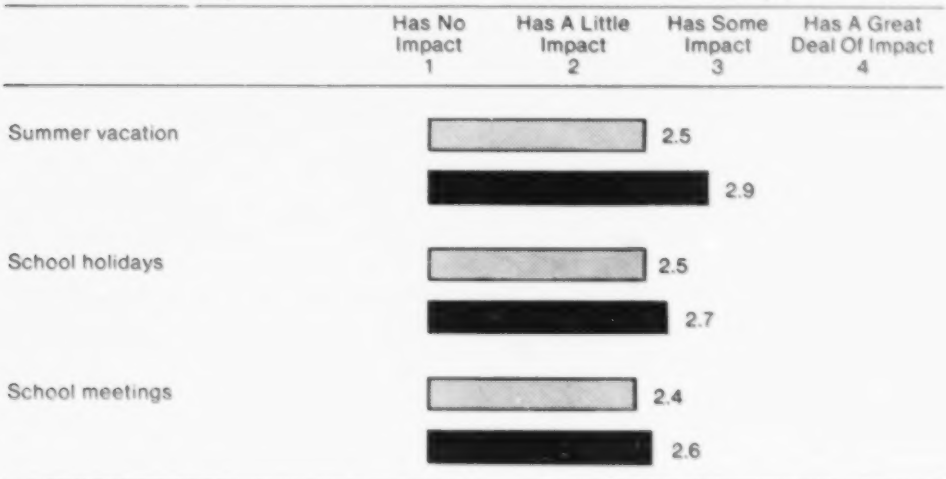
School's Out

Summer vacation is not considered as big a problem among employers or clerical workers without children, compared with the reality expressed by clerical workers with children. Where 13% of company staff and 25% of clerical workers without children feel summer vacation has "a great deal" of impact on job performance and productivity, 37% of clerical workers who actually have to negotiate over two months of long, hot days say summer vacation has a major impact on their worklives. Summer vacation is more of a problem for those employees with children between 6 and 18 years of age, since the day care problems of parents with children under six exist year-round. (Refer to Appendix 3).

The Parents (continued)

School holidays and meetings cause only minor interruptions in work routine, probably because they occur less frequently. Holidays may also coincide with parents' own days off from work.

Table 3 ☐ Impact Of School Vacation/Holidays



☐ = Employers

■ = Clerical Employees

The Employers: Impact Of Child Care On The Job

Overall, there is some agreement between employers and clerical workers that child care problems cost companies a lot in terms of productivity. However, there is disagreement within each of these groups as to whether child care is the sole responsibility of the parents, or whether the employer has some obligation to help alleviate child care problems that affect job performance.

In addition, there is major disagreement between employers and clerical workers on the *value* of good employees. Among clerical workers, 43% strongly agree that companies should subsidize the cost of child care rather than replace good employees who are beset by child care problems. By contrast, only 17% of employers strongly agree that it is preferable to subsidize child care, rather than to hire and train new employees. (Refer to Appendix 1).

Beyond Nine To Five

There is overwhelming agreement among employers and clerical workers that the ability to work overtime is more affected by child care responsibilities than is any other employment problem. This should come as no surprise since clerical workers cite after school/day care problems and transportation as child care problems that affect job performance.

Time Out

While both employers and clerical workers feel that absenteeism and tardiness are bigger problems for employees with children, clerical workers agree more strongly with this statement (43%) than do employers (25%). Again, it may be either that employees exaggerate the impact of child care problems on work attendance, or that personnel managers underestimate the extent of the problem, since they may not be directly involved.

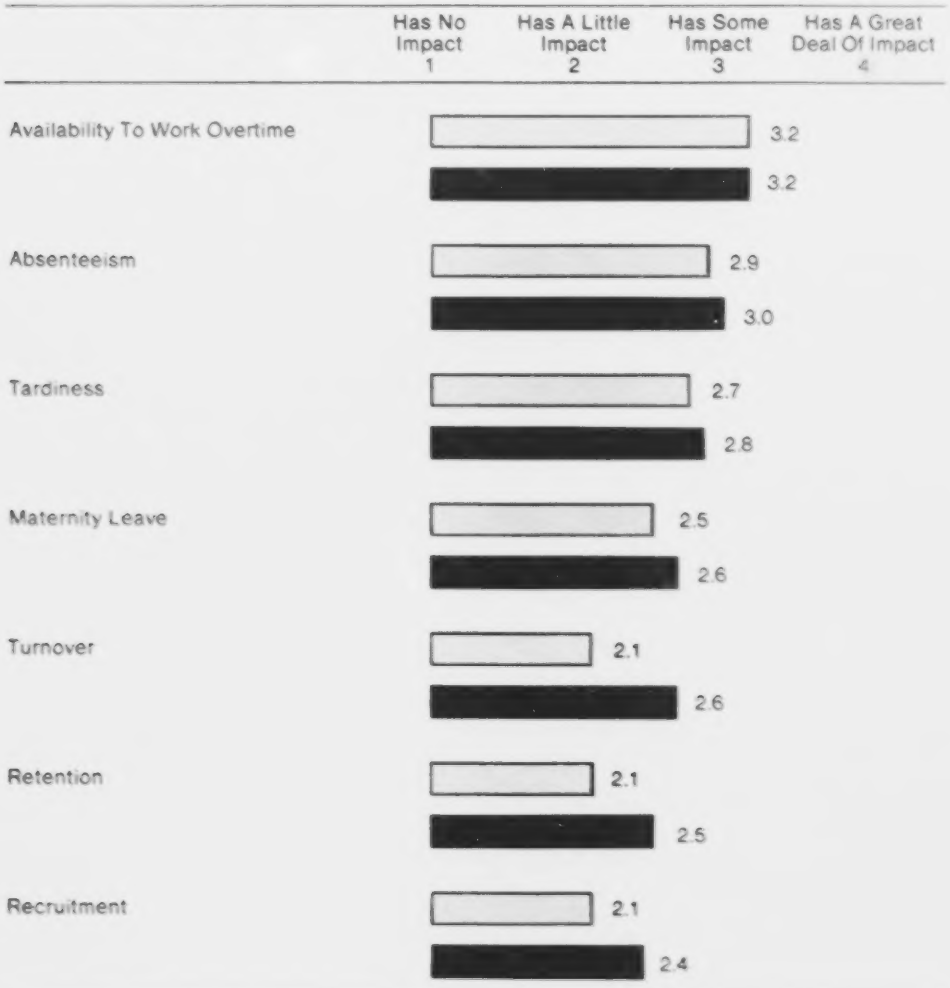
Both employers and clerical employees agree that maternity leave creates staffing shortages. However, this is not considered as big a problem as the impact of actual child care needs on ability to work overtime, absenteeism, and tardiness.

The Employers (continued)

Staying Power

Turnover, recruitment and retention are not perceived to be affected by child care needs to the same extent as the employment problems just described. However, as noted earlier, employers and employees differ markedly in their opinions as to how companies should address these concerns, indicating that each group may be approaching these and other employment problems from a fundamentally different perspective.

Table 4 ☐ Company Employment Problems Affected By Child Care



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Benefits And Policies: Workable Alternatives

While both employers and clerical workers agree in principle that employees should be able to choose from among a variety of benefits that can be tailored to their individual needs, the most frequently offered benefits and policies tend to be those that are applicable to *all* employees.

This is understandable since benefits and policies need to be equitable. However, a given benefit program may not suit an individual family's needs. And since many employers offer the same basic benefits, in a two income household there is likely to be an unnecessary duplication of benefits.

Few employers offer flexible benefit packages which allow employees to select those benefits that best meet their family's needs. Known as "cafeteria" benefit plans, such packages may be a promising future option for working parents. Child care benefits could then be one of many benefit options available to all employees.

Clerical workers were more strongly in favor of a cafeteria style benefit plan (51%) than were employers (34%). Employers may perceive that this flexible benefit package could cost them substantially more than their current plan, due to complex administration requirements. Cafeteria plans, especially those with open enrollment periods, may result in a different benefit package for each employee. This creates more cumbersome record keeping, boosting administrative costs.

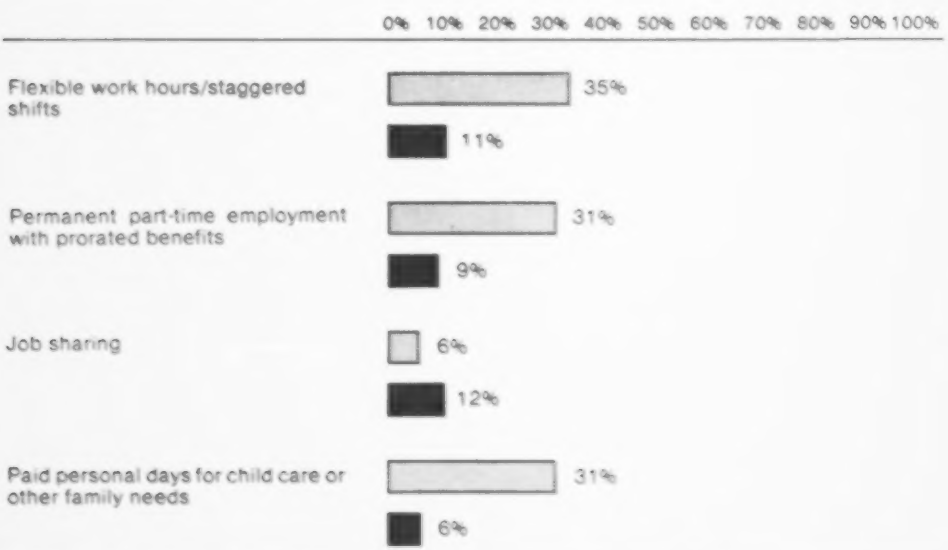
What specific benefits are employers currently offering or considering, and what benefits are most desired by clerical workers?

Options In The Workplace

Only a third of the employers surveyed are currently offering alternative scheduling options such as flexible work hours/staggered shifts or permanent part-time employment with prorated benefits. A third of the employers also offer paid personal days for family responsibilities or other needs. Job sharing is being offered by only 6% of the employers surveyed. Fewer than 10% of employers are considering offering any of these benefit options in the *near future*.

Benefits And Policies (continued)

Table 5 ☐ Flexible Work Options Being Offered/Considered



☐ = Offered

■ = Considered

These numbers seem to indicate that there are, and will continue to be, limited options available to most employees for integrating work and family responsibilities through their jobs.

Both employers and clerical workers think that more women with child care responsibilities would work part-time if they could afford it. However, when permanent clerical workers with children were asked their preference, 45% replied that they would still work full time – even if money was no longer an issue! Another 39% would opt to work part-time. This indicates that there would continue to be a need for flexibility in work hours, even if working parents' economic needs are met.

In addition, 25% of temporary clerical workers say that they are working temporary because they have children at home and don't want to work full time. It appears that temporary employment may be one of the few viable options available to working parents who can't or don't want to work a regular forty-hour week.

Benefits And Policies (continued)

Children: The First Few Months

Four out of ten employers (38%) are offering paid disability and personal leave for mothers beyond the traditional six weeks' pregnancy/maternity leave. An additional 5% are considering offering this benefit in the near future.

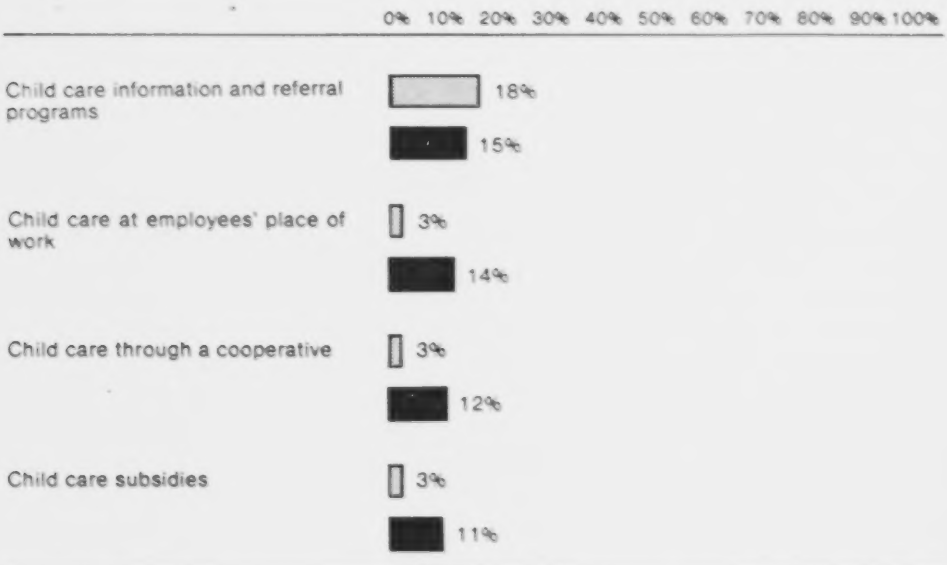
It appears that this particular aspect of parenthood is getting the lion's share of employers' attention. It may be that simply extending their general long-term disability coverage is seen as an easier benefit to implement than more far ranging child care benefits.

Children: The Next Five Years

Of a number of potential benefits specific to child care, only information and referral programs are being offered and/or considered by any substantial number of companies – 18% currently offer this benefit, and 15% are considering it.

Only 3% of employers are currently offering any of the more comprehensive forms of child care assistance, including child care at employees' place of work, child care services provided through a cooperative, or child care subsidies. Fewer than 15% of employers are considering offering any of these benefits in the near future.

Table 6 □ Child Care Benefits Offered/Considered



Benefits And Policies (continued)

This contrasts sharply with what clerical workers would like to see offered: between 40% and 50% of clerical employees would like to see these same benefit options made available to them.

This discrepancy portrays the national employee/employer child care situation in microcosm. Recent national statistics show that a scant 1800 of the nation's six million employers have implemented what has been hailed as "the employee benefit of the 1990's." Why?

One reason is cost versus use. According to the National Employer Supported Child Care Project (a study funded by the Department of Health and Human Services), on-site day care centers are used by only 4% to 10% of employees at any given time. Some centers have even closed due to lack of use. This occurs because child care needs fluctuate from year to year, and many centers don't offer infant or after-school care.

Licensing of facilities can pose a problem, as can finding qualified child care workers to staff an on-site center or off-site cooperative.

Additionally, the Health and Human Services study found that many parents may not want to commute with their children. Finally, non-parents may resent having to pay for a benefit they cannot use.

Nevertheless, both employers and clerical workers generally agree that the cost of child care is too high for most clerical employees to afford. More clerical workers (59%) than employers (38%) strongly agree that government should provide incentives to business to provide child care subsidies or programs.

This again raises the issue of who is responsible for child care. Some employees and employers may feel that government has an economic as well as a social obligation to provide for its citizens' needs; others may view such third party involvement as an intrusion upon the traditional American family.

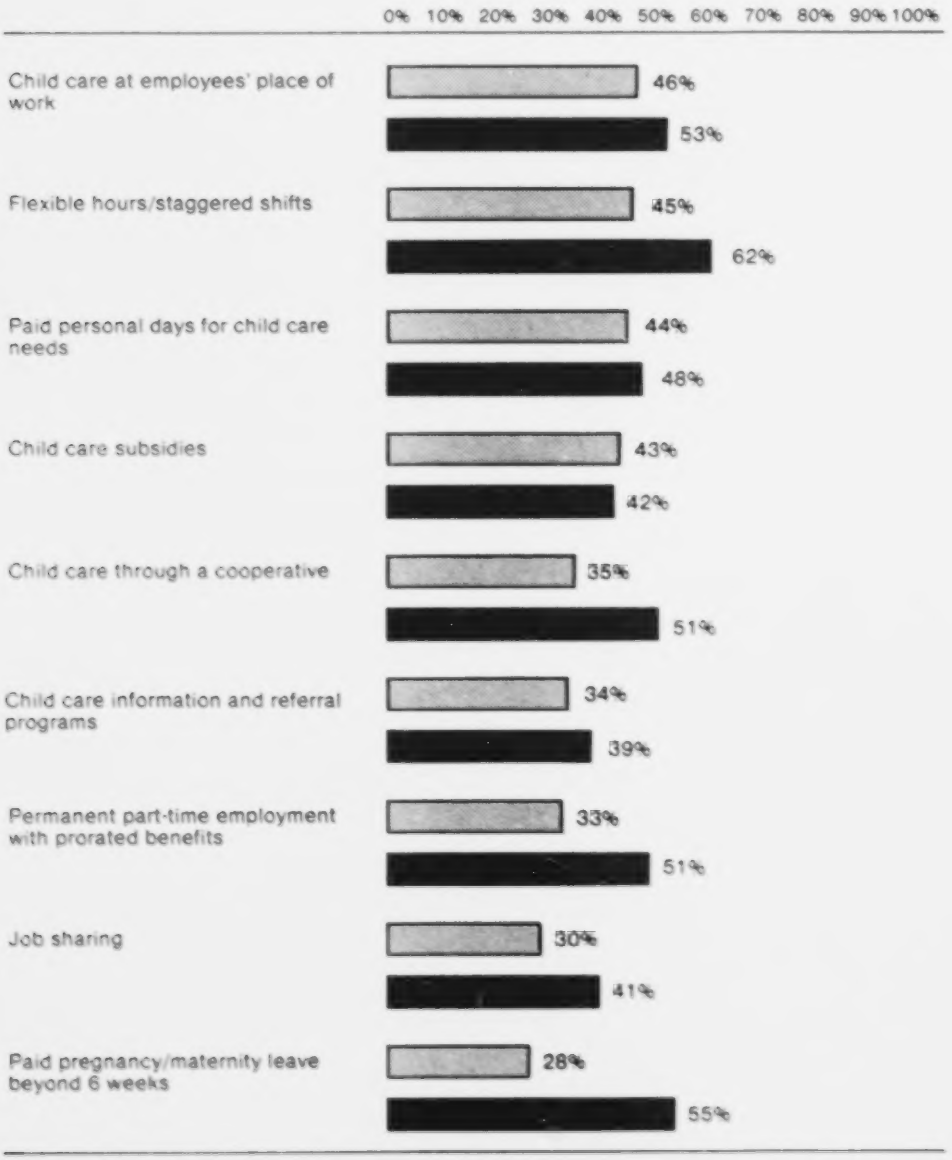
Parents: The Best Benefits

While all of the benefits hold strong appeal for clerical employees with children, the ones they would consider *most* helpful include child care on the employer's premises, flexible work hours/staggered shifts, and paid personal days specifically for child care/family needs.

Benefits And Policies (continued)

Overall, it appears that what parents would like most is to be able to choose, from among a wide range of benefit options, those that can best meet their individual family needs.

Table 7 ☐ Benefits Preferred By Clerical Workers/Parents



☐ = Clerical employees with children would find *most* helpful

■ = *All* Clerical workers would like to see offered

Conclusion

Any investigation into current child care options tends to raise more questions than it answers. For example, if the need to work is now a financial reality for the majority of clerical workforce parents, how involved should schools, government and the employers themselves become in supporting employees' child care needs?

What role do employer/employee attitudes towards the importance of clerical workers' jobs play in job retention and turnover – especially when the stress of unmet child care needs is part of the equation?

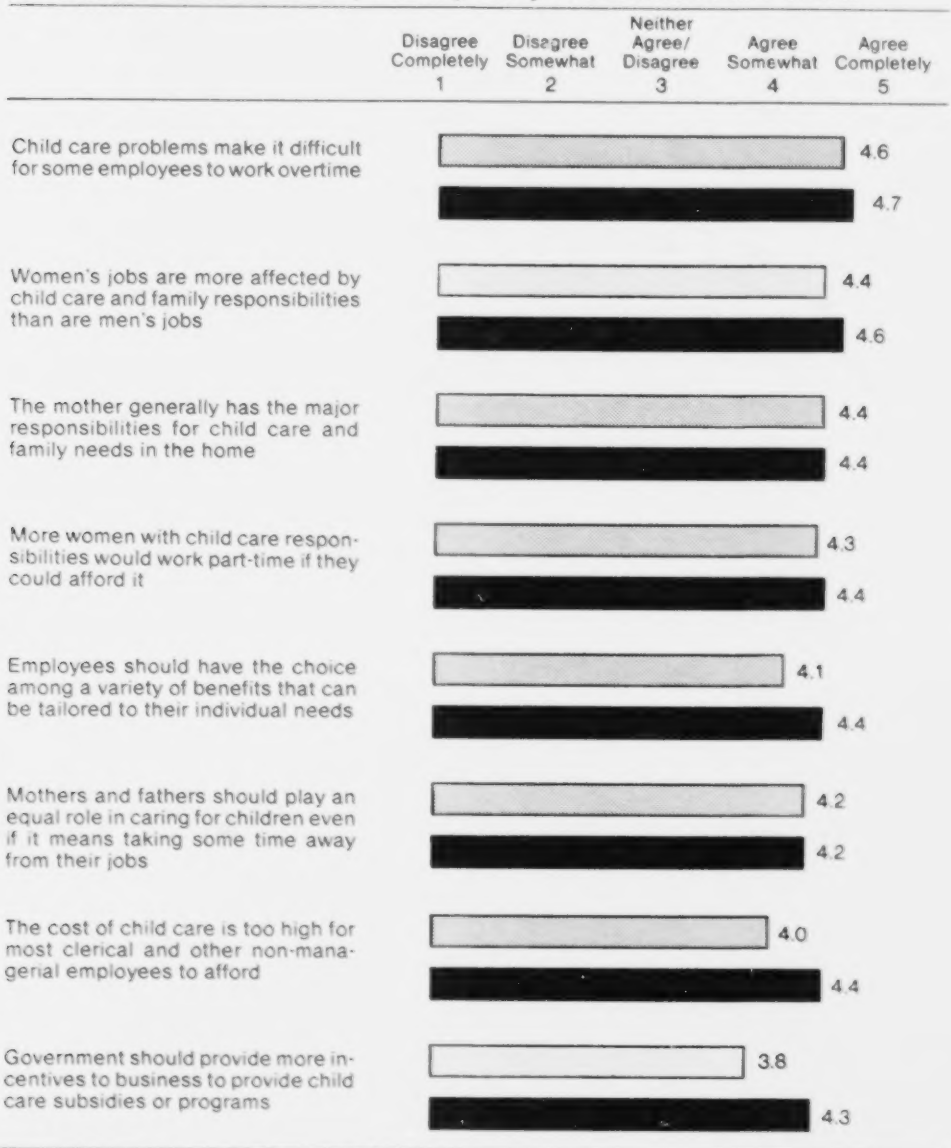
Finally, how do clerical workers who are also parents deal with the conflicting demands of work and home life on an emotional level? Contrary to popular belief, both employers and clerical employees in our sample report that working mothers are fairly free of guilt over leaving their children in someone else's care, or of putting their jobs ahead of their families. Their feelings may stem from the economic imperative: when working is a matter of survival, there is no room for guilt.

In addition, there is the acknowledged social aspect to working: half the employees in our sample, with or without children, would continue to work full time even if they had enough money for their needs, and two-thirds of permanent clerical employees with children say they work for the social interaction and sense of personal fulfillment they get on the job.

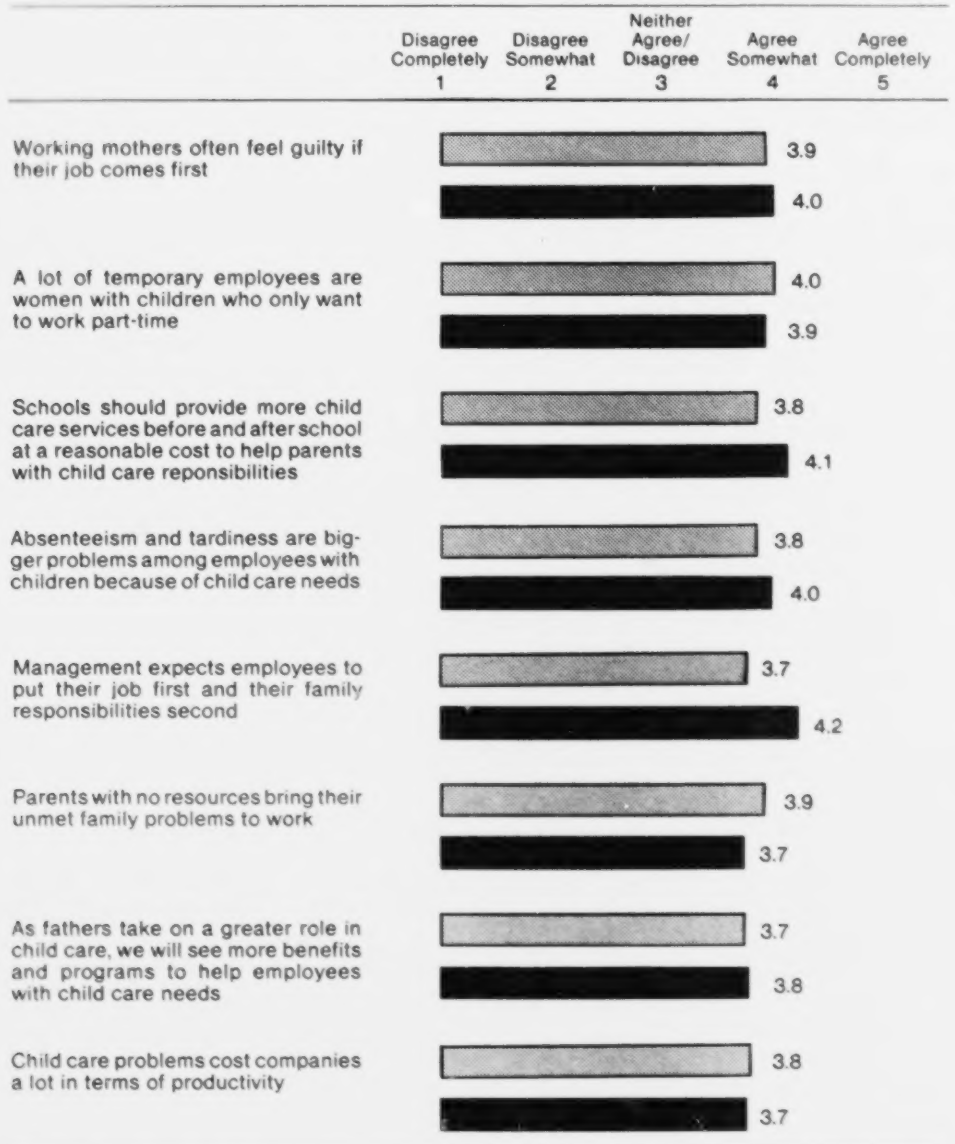
All of these questions arise from the diversity of values and beliefs that permeate our culture. Education is the first step toward finding acceptable alternatives to existing modes of family/work interaction. The employers and clerical employees who participated in this survey are helping to bring about this increased awareness and ultimately, new options in child care.

Appendix 1

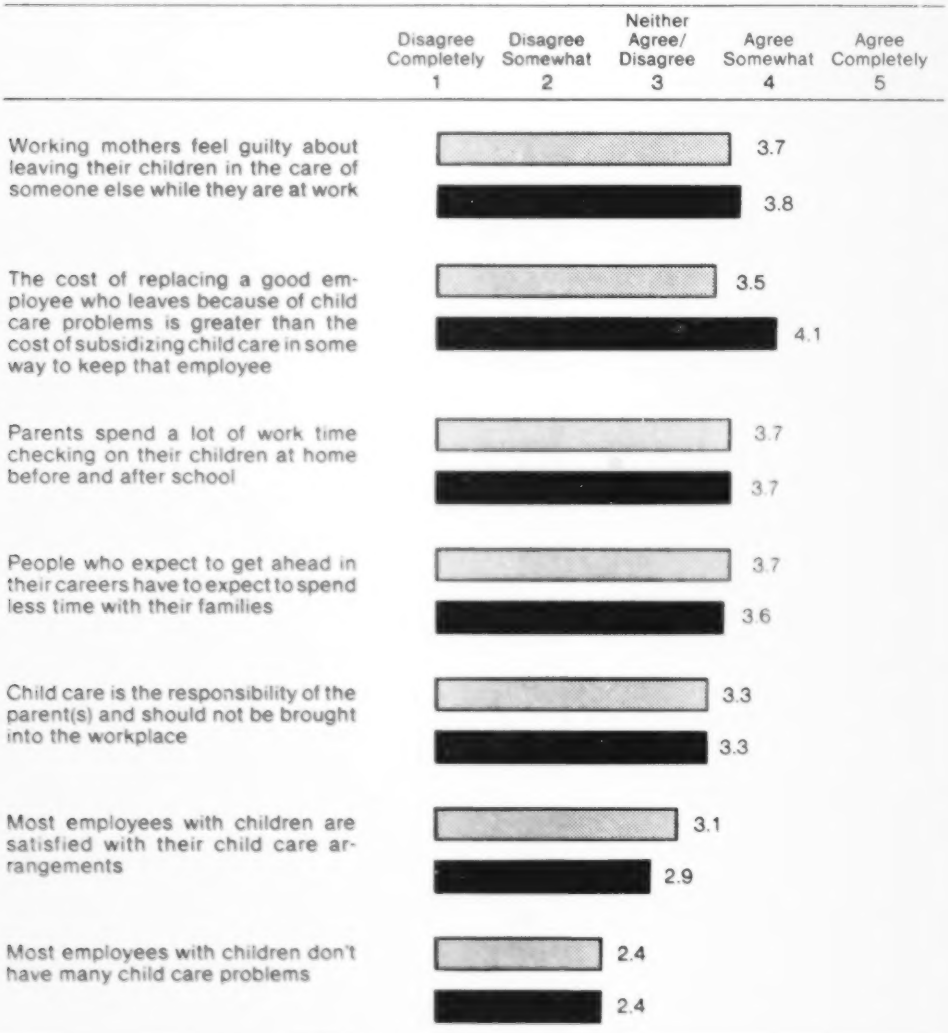
☐ Attitudes And Opinions of Employers And Clerical Employees Regarding Child Care, Family Responsibilities And Work


Disagree Completely 1
Disagree Somewhat 2
Neither Agree/ Disagree 3
Agree Somewhat 4
Agree Completely 5
Child care problems make it difficult for some employees to work overtime
4.6
4.7
Women's jobs are more affected by child care and family responsibilities than are men's jobs
4.4
4.6
The mother generally has the major responsibilities for child care and family needs in the home
4.4
4.4
More women with child care responsibilities would work part-time if they could afford it
4.3
4.4
Employees should have the choice among a variety of benefits that can be tailored to their individual needs
4.1
4.4
Mothers and fathers should play an equal role in caring for children even if it means taking some time away from their jobs
4.2
4.2
The cost of child care is too high for most clerical and other non-managerial employees to afford
4.0
4.4
Government should provide more incentives to business to provide child care subsidies or programs
3.8
4.3
☐ = Employers
■ = Clerical Employees

Appendix 1 (continued)


Disagree Completely 1
Disagree Somewhat 2
Neither Agree/ Disagree 3
Agree Somewhat 4
Agree Completely 5
Working mothers often feel guilty if their job comes first
3.9
4.0
A lot of temporary employees are women with children who only want to work part-time
4.0
3.9
Schools should provide more child care services before and after school at a reasonable cost to help parents with child care reponsibilities
3.8
4.1
Absenteeism and tardiness are bigger problems among employees with children because of child care needs
3.8
4.0
Management expects employees to put their job first and their family responsibilities second
3.7
4.2
Parents with no resources bring their unmet family problems to work
3.9
3.7
As fathers take on a greater role in child care, we will see more benefits and programs to help employees with child care needs
3.7
3.8
Child care problems cost companies a lot in terms of productivity
3.8
3.7
= Employers
= Clerical Employees

Appendix 1 (continued)


Disagree Completely 1
Disagree Somewhat 2
Neither Agree/ Disagree 3
Agree Somewhat 4
Agree Completely 5
Working mothers feel guilty about leaving their children in the care of someone else while they are at work
3.7
3.8
The cost of replacing a good employee who leaves because of child care problems is greater than the cost of subsidizing child care in some way to keep that employee
3.5
4.1
Parents spend a lot of work time checking on their children at home before and after school
3.7
3.7
People who expect to get ahead in their careers have to expect to spend less time with their families
3.7
3.6
Child care is the responsibility of the parent(s) and should not be brought into the workplace
3.3
3.3
Most employees with children are satisfied with their child care arrangements
3.1
2.9
Most employees with children don't have many child care problems
2.4
2.4
= Employers
= Clerical Employees

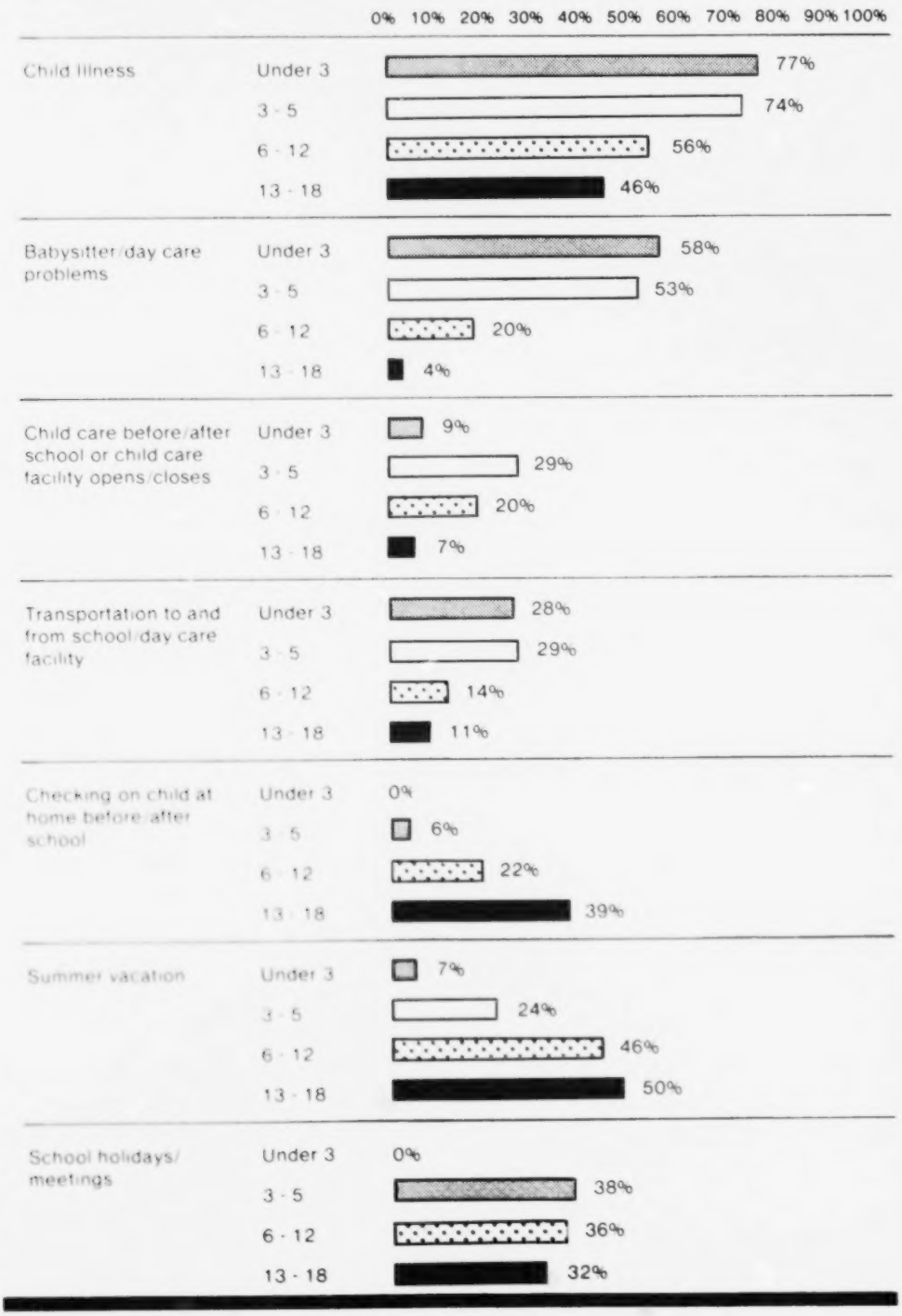
Appendix 2

☐ Demographic Data By Temporary/Permanent And Children/No Children

	Total	Temporary	Permanent	With Children	Without Children
Marital Status					
Married	46%	44%	50%	52%	42%
Single	31%	31%	32%	18%	42%
Divorced/Separated	19%	20%	17%	27%	11%
Widowed	2%	2%	2%	—	—
No Answer	2%				
Age					
18-24	23%	21%	25%	15%	29%
25-39	60%	57%	65%	73%	47%
40-55+	17%	21%	10%	12%	22%
Income					
$20,000 or less	47%	57%	30%	49%	46%
$21-29,999	19%	16%	23%	18%	19%
$30-39,999	15%	12%	20%	18%	12%
$40,000+	17%	12%	25%	14%	21%
No Answer	2%				

Appendix 3

☐ Clerical Employees With Children: Child Care Responsibilities With Most Impact, By Age Of Child


0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%
Child illness
Under 3 77%
3 - 5 74%
6 - 12 56%
13 - 18 46%
Babysitter/day care problems
Under 3 58%
3 - 5 53%
6 - 12 20%
13 - 18 4%
Child care before/after school or child care facility opens/closes
Under 3 9%
3 - 5 29%
6 - 12 20%
13 - 18 7%
Transportation to and from school/day care facility
Under 3 28%
3 - 5 29%
6 - 12 14%
13 - 18 11%
Checking on child at home before/after school
Under 3 0%
3 - 5 6%
6 - 12 22%
13 - 18 39%
Summer vacation
Under 3 7%
3 - 5 24%
6 - 12 46%
13 - 18 50%
School holidays/ meetings
Under 3 0%
3 - 5 38%
6 - 12 36%
13 - 18 32%